AIR AMERICA: DOUGLAS C-54s
by Dr. Joe F. Leeker

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An Air America C-54 at Tachikawa in 1968
(Air America Log, vol. II, no. 5, 1968, p.5)

The types of missions flown by Air America’s C-54s:

From the times of Civil Air Transport, Air America had inherited 3 C-54s or DC-4s: Two of them were assigned to the Booklift contract to transport the *Stars and Stripes* from Japan to Korea and one of them seems to have been used by Civil Air Transport or other carriers like Air Vietnam (on lease) or VIAT or Vietnamese Air Transport,¹ that is Bureau 45B – Northern Service (Biet Kích So Bac; see: [http://ngothelinh.tripod.com/Tribute.htm](http://ngothelinh.tripod.com/Tribute.htm)), the front used by the CIA and the South Vietnamese Government for commando raids into North Vietnam between 1961 and 1964. In 1965 two of Air America’s C-54s were converted to FAA standards and given US registry as had been requested for service under the new Booklift contract. At the same time two more C-54s were acquired for use out of Taipei under a new contract with the USAF’s Logistical Support Group. Another C-54 (B-1016) was acquired in late 66 for use as a cargo aircraft first by Civil Air Transport and later by Air America who used it to carry Company properties between the main airports, as needed. And this role allowed it to become the last C-54 to remain with Air America.

Statistics according to official Air America documents:
- Inventory of 1 February 66 (in: UTD/Herd/B2): 2 under B-registry and 2 under N-registry > 4
- Inventories of 31 March 72 > 30 November 72 (in: UTD/CIA/B1F10): 5 > 5

¹ See: Conboy / Andradé, *Spies and commandos*, pp. 33-44.
The individual aircraft histories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>registration / serial</th>
<th>c/n (msn)</th>
<th>date acquired</th>
<th>origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Air Transport</td>
<td>C-54A B-1002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>at Hong Kong 21 Oct. 57</td>
<td>(UTD/Kirkpatrick/slide B 1032)</td>
<td></td>
<td>in Mandarin colors at Taipei 30 Sept. 59</td>
<td>(UTD/Kirkpatrick/slide A 5113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas C-54A</td>
<td>B-1002</td>
<td>3078</td>
<td>(31 Mar. 59)</td>
<td>CAT B-1002; previously 41-37287, then BuA 39141 then N86552, then PI-C 108, then N86552</td>
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**Service history:** officially regd. on 17 June 52 (e-mail sent by the Director General, CAA, Republic of China, to Martin Best on 18 October 2012, kindly forwarded to the author by Martin Best); in airline service with CATCL in September 59; a color slide taken at Taipei on 30 September 59 by E. C. Kirkpatrick shows the aircraft in Mandarin colors (UTD/Kirkpatrick/slide A 5113); still with CAT in early 1960, when it was photographed by Mel Lawrence at Tokyo (see the photo in: Skyliners 3, p.78), while on the Taipei-Okinawa-Tokyo-Seoul run; on 28 July 1961, CAT operated its last scheduled international flight by a DC-4; the aircraft was then used for round-the-island domestic flights, charter flights and extra-section flights (History of Civil Air Transport, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B2F13).

**Fate:** sold and delivered to VIAT/AII, Saigon, by Conditional Sale Contract no. 61-079, probably in August 1961 (Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, p.44), as a Memorandum by Air America’s Assistant Legal Counsel Jerry Fink, dated 11 October 1961 (preserved in: UTD/Fink/B2F15) discusses whether the aircraft should be cancelled from Air America’s aircraft liability insurance or not; it was subsequently re-regd. as XV-NUB (as is proved by a photo taken of VIAT’s mission board in 1961/2, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu on 14 November 2004); this is believed to have been the VIAT C-54 that crashed into a mountain in North Vietnam in late February or on 1 March 1962 during heavy rain (Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp. 44/5); however, officially B-1002 was “sold” to VIAT only on 1 September 63 (Aircraft list of June 62, corrected to Sept. 1963, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); as VIAT did no longer fly any C-54s in September 63, that was probably only the date when the property titles of B-1002 officially passed to VIAT after Air America had received the last payment – or it was simply a trick that was to make believe that the C-54 that had crashed in North Vietnam was another one.
CAT C-54G B-1004 at Kai Tak airport, Hong Kong, on 14 February 57, taken by E.C. Kirkpatrick
(UTD/Kirkpatrick/ color slide no. 1KP-B1-SC961)

Air America C-54G B-1004 at K-14 airport, Korea, in January 61, taken by Mel Lawrence
(with kind permission from Mel Lawrence / Airliners.net)

Douglas C-54G B-1004 36072 (31 Mar. 59) CAT B-1004; previously USAF 45-0619, then N88941, then 45-0619

Service history: officially regd. on 24 August 53 (e-mail sent by the Director General, CAA, Republic of China, to Martin Best on 18 October 2012, kindly forwarded to the author by Martin Best); acquired by CAT in “44/3”, that is in March 55 according to Air Asia’s Statement of Property of 31 March 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B26F5); leased from Civil Air Transport; put onto contract no. AF 62(501)-981 (Booklift) on 10 December 60, operating out of Tachikawa (Air America Inc., Tachikawa monthly report for December 1960, in: UTD/Lewis/B1F9); a photo taken by Mel Lawrence at K-14 airport, Korea, in January 61 can be found in the Airliners.net collection; leased from Air Asia since 62; still assigned to the Booklift contract for use out of Tachikawa 1 July to 13 July 63, then to Tainan for maintenance 15-21 July 63 (AAM aircraft availability of 1 July 63, and 15 July 63, in: UTD/Walker/B25F8); not listed in the lists “AAM Aircraft availability as of 1 February 64” (in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly faxed it to the author on 17 February 2004) “AAM Aircraft availability as of 1 April 64” (in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4), so probably used by CAT at that time; used by Civil Air Transport on domestic schedules out of Taipei in July 64 (Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); based at Tachikawa for Booklift in May 65 (Planned Aircraft Assignments, Memos of 3 May 65 and 22 May 65, in: UTD/Walker/B12F3).

Fate: bought by Air America on 27 September 65; rereg. N12191 on 27 September 65; as the USAF requested FAA-certificated and US-regd. aircraft to be used on the Booklift contract from Japan to South Korea; the conversion and adaptation of the aircraft to FAA standards for passenger service cost about $ 73,000 (Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 6 April 65, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4).

N12191 36072 27 Sept. 65 re-regd. from B-1004

Service history: based at Tachikawa in October 65 (Planned Aircraft Assignments, Memo of 27 October 65, in: UTD/Walker/B12F3); assigned to contract AF62(562)-1162 (Booklift) for use out of Tachikawa in November 65 (Aircraft status as of 1 Nov. 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1), April 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1), and May 66 (Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2); assigned to contract AF62562-67-C-0604 (Booklift) for use out of Tachikawa in May 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); in June
68, N12191 received damage to the left horizontal stabilizer, when the tip partially separated prior to landing at Iwakuni; repaired (Air America Inc., Tachikawa monthly report for June 68, in: UTD/Lewis/B1F10); in November 68, N12191 was involved in a lightning strike and/or static build-up, but was repaired (Tachikawa monthly report for November 68, in: UTD/Lewis/B1F10); a photo taken at Yokota on 3 November 68 can be found in the photo collection at http://geta-o.maxs.jp/CIVIL/US/MDC/DC-4/dc-4(air_america)n12191-sd6.jpg; still used on the Booklift contract (-0231) out of Tachikawa, Japan, 16-30 June 69 (F.O.C. of 15 June 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B) and 16-31 August 69 (F.O.C. of 15 August 69, in: UTD/Hickler/BF1); a photo of N12191 landing at Yokota around 1970 while carrying dead soldiers from the front line to Japan can be found at http://www.wetwing.com/military/usaf/usaf96foto/dc4.jpg; assigned to contract F11626-71-C-0052 (Booklift) for use out of Yokota AFB, Japan, at least 1-31 July 71 (F.O.C.s of 1 July 71 and 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); put into inactive storage at Tainan on 8 October 72; still there 1 November 73 (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

**Fate:** sold to Air Distribution Inc., Honolulu, HI, on 13 November 73 (Summary of aircraft sales, in: UTD/CIA/B40F6); named “Dena”; the change of ownership was noted by the FAA on 30 November 73; rereg N404AD 12 April 74; the company went bankrupt in 1975; the aircraft was stored at Tainan with Air Asia (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 17 December 75, in: UTD/CIA/B17F4); sold to Air Asia on 25 February 76; sold to E-Systems, Dallas, TX, on 17 April 78 and reinstated as N404AD that same day; sold to Air Cargo Enterprises Inc. on 17 April 78; sold to Hayes Intl. Corp. on 18 October 79, but leased back to Air Cargo Enterprises the same day; sold to Pacific Air Express, Honolulu, on 21 May 82; rereg N300JT on 13 March 83 (many details of this subsequent history of former B-1004 were supplied by John Davis in his e-mail dated 14 November 2004 sent to Dr. Erik Carlson, who forwarded them to the author); crashed after engine failure on approach to Kahului, HI, on 29 June 83.
Air America C-54G N2168

at Tachikawa in August 60
(with kind permission from Mel Lawrence/ Airliners.net)
on lease to Air Vietnam possibly at Hong Kong in 1961
(UTD/Kirkpatrick/B32)

Air America C-54G N12190

at Misawa Air Base in 1968 at Yokota Air Base on 30 June 70

Douglas C-54G N2168 36028 (31 Mar. 59) CAT N2168 since 8 Aug. 1956; previously USAF 45-0575, then N2168 with the Airdale Corp.

Service history: leased to Air Vietnam, Saigon; possibly, this was between 20 February and 20 August 57, when N2168 was “exported” by CAT Inc. (Status as of 15 January 74 in UTD/CIA/B56F3); put onto contract no. AF 62(501)-981 (Booklift), on 10 December 60, operating out of Tachikawa (Air America Inc., Tachikawa monthly report for December 1960, UTD/Lewis/B1F9); a photo of N2168 with Air America titles, taken by Mel Lawrence at Tachikawa Air Base, Japan, in August 1960, can be found in the Air America.net collection; in the summer of 1961, N2168 was leased to Air Vietnam for daily trips from Saigon to Hong Kong and Bangkok (Jim Keck, manuscript, chapter 5, p. 22); a photo taken at Hong Kong is preserved in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B32.

Fate: sold by Air America to Air Asia Co Ltd on 2 January 62 (Status as of 15 January 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F3); regd B-1010 on 8 January 62. B-1010 36028 8 Jan. 62 N2168 rereg.

Service history: acquired in “51/1”, that is in January 62 according to Air Asia’s Statement of Property of 31 March 65 (in: UTD/CIA/B26F5); a photo of B-1010 bearing Air America titles that was taken at Tachikawa in 1963, can be found in the photo collection at http://geta-o.maxs.jp/CIVIL/US/MDC/DC-4/dc-4(airamerica)b-1010-sd6.jpg; assigned to Booklift contract for use out of Tachikawa on 13 July 63 after returning from maintenance at Tainan (AAM aircraft availability of 1 July 63, 15 July 63, and 21 September 63, in: UTD/Walker/B25F8); still assigned to contract AF62(562)-656 (Booklift) for use out of Tachikawa in February 64 and in April 64
Air Asia Co. Ltd. C-54G B-1010, Certificate of Registration of 8 January 62
(UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel no. 4)

**Fate:** sold by Air Asia Co Ltd. to Air America on 27 September 65 (Status as of 15 January 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F3); rereg N12190 on 13 October 65 (Status as of 15 January 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F3), as the USAF requested FAA-certificated and US-regd. aircraft to be used on the Booklift contract from Japan to South Korea; the conversion and adaptation of the aircraft to FAA standards for passenger service cost about $73,000 (Minutes ExCom-AAACL/AAM of 6 April 65, in: UTD/CIA/B7F4).

(AAM Aircraft availability of 1 February 64, in the possession of Ward Reimer who kindly faxed it to the author on 17 February 2004; Aircraft availability as of 1 April 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B8F4) and in July 64 (Aircraft status as of 7 July 64, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); based at Tachikawa for Booklift in May 65 (Planned Aircraft Assignments, Memos of 3 May 65 and 22 May 65, in: UTD/Walker/B12F3).
Air America C-54G N12190 at Wakkanai, Japan in 1971/2
(with kind permission from Roger Fischer)

N12190 36028 27 Sept. 65 B-1010 rereg'd.

**Service history:** based at Tachikawa in October 65 (Planned Aircraft Assignments, Memo of 27 October 65, in: UTD/Walker/B12F3); assigned to contract AF62(562)-1162 (*Booklift*) for use out of Tachikawa in November 65 (Aircraft status as of 1 Nov. 65, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1); April 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1), and May 66 (Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2); on 25 September 66, a typhoon blew the section of a building into the aircraft, so that the tail section was badly damaged; repaired (Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 28 September 66, in: UTD/CIA/B8F1); a photo taken at Yokota on 29 October 66 can be found in the photo collection at [http://geta-max.s.ip/CIVIL/US/MDC/DC-4/n12190(air_america)dc-4-0394.jpg](http://geta-max.s.ip/CIVIL/US/MDC/DC-4/n12190(air_america)dc-4-0394.jpg); assigned to contract AF62562-67-C-0604 (*Booklift*) for use out of Tachikawa in May 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); in July 68, N12190 sustained damage to the forward lower left fuselage, when a refueling unit driver lost control of his vehicle and collided with the aircraft; repaired (Tachikawa monthly report for July 68, in: UTD/Lewis/B1F10); withdrawn from use and stored in 68; photos in *Air America Log*, vol. III, no.2, 1969, and *Airliners*, Fall 1993, p. 3; still used on the *Booklift* contract (-0231) out of Tachikawa, Japan, 16-30 June 69 (F.O.C. of 15 June 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B) and 16-31 August 69 (F.O.C. of 15 August 69, in: UTD/Hickler/BF1); assigned to contract F11626-71-C-0052 (*Booklift*) for use out of Yokota AFB, Japan, at least 1-31 July 71 (F.O.C.s of 1 July 71 and 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); seen at Yokota AFB 10 February 73 (*Aviation Letter* 78, May 73, p.7); assigned to contract F11626-72-0036 (*Booklift*) for use out of Yokota at least 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still assigned to contract F11626-72-0036 (*Booklift*) for use out of Yokota 1 November-31 December 73; when Yokota was closed down in February 74, it was ferried to Tainan for storage on 14 January 74 (Yokota close out plan dated 28 February 74, in: UTD/CIA/B17F6; F.O.C. of 1 January 74, formerly in: UTD/Leary/Ser.I, B15F3, now ?); used from Tainan as a spare aircraft at least 1-28 February 74 and 1 April-31 May 74 (F.O.C. of
1 February 74, in: UTD/CIA/B51F21; F.O.C.s of 1 November 73, 1 December 73, 1 April 74, and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

**Fate:** was scheduled to be delivered from Tainan to the Continental US on 8 May 75 (Telex dated 20 March 75, in: UTD/CIA/B18F2), but was sold to Air Vietnam, Saigon, as XV-NU? on 29 March 75 (Telex dated 29 March 75, in: UTD/CIA/B18F2); Bill of Sale dated 2 April 75 (Summary of aircraft sales, in: UTD/CIA/B40F6); cancellation of registry was requested on 22 April 75 (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 22 April 75, in: UTD/CIA/B17F4).

Douglas C-54D B-1012 10655 Nov. 65 leased from Air Asia B-1012; previously USAF 42-72550; then N56412 (canx. on 30 Nov. 65)

**Service history:** acquired in “54/11”, that is in November 65 according to Air Asia’s Statement of Property of 31 March 66 (in: UTD/CIA/B26F5); promissory note no.14 dated 15 November 65 (UTD/CIA/B9F4) mentions $ 160,000.00 owed by Air America to the Pacific Corp. for this aircraft, so probably it was bought at that time; officially regd. on 13 December 65 (e-mail sent by the Director General, CAA, Republic of China, to Martin Best on 18 October 2012, kindly forwarded to the author by Martin Best); based at Saigon in December 65, but reassigned to Kadena, Okinawa on 1 January 66 (Planned Aircraft Assignment for January 66, in: UTD/Walker/B7 F8); assigned to contract AF49(604)-4379 (*Logistical Support Group*) for use out of Taipei in April 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1) and May 66 (Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2); used as a spare aircraft out of Taipei in May 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herb/B2); converted to AAM standard in July 66 (Minutes Ex Com-AACL/AAM of 13 July 66, in: UTD/CIA/B8F1); based at Taipei, unassigned, 16-30 June 69 (F.O.C. of 15 June 69, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B) and 16-31 August 69 (F.O.C. of 15 August 69, in: UTD/Hickler/BF1); current on 1 July 70 (Leary, *The aircraft of Air America*, p. 20); leased to China Airlines, Taipei, seen at Hong Kong on 8 June 71 (*Aviation Letter* 56, July 1971, p.3), still with China Airlines at least 1-27 July 71 (F.O.C.s of 1 July 71 and 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); put into inactive storage at Tainan on 29 February 72; still there on 1 November 73 (F.O.C. of 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C).

**Fate:** sold to Air Distribution Inc., Honolulu, HI, on 13 November 73 (Summary of aircraft sales, in: UTD/CIA/B40F6); officially transferred from Air Asia to Air America on 29 November 73; the change of ownership to Air Distribution was noted by the FAA on 30 November 73; the reg. B-1012 was cancelled on 3 December 73; re-registered as N402AD on 3 December 73; the company went bankrupt in 1975 (many details of the subsequent history of former B-1012 were supplied by John Davis in his e-mail dated 14 November 2004 to Dr. Erik Carlson, who forwarded them to the author); the aircraft was stored at Tainan with Air Asia (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 17 December 75, in: UTD/CIA/B17F4); sold to Air Asia on 25 February 76; withdrawn from use and stored September 77.

Douglas C-54D B-1014 10869 Dec. 65 leased from Air Asia B-1014; previously USAF 42-72764; then N45918 (canx. on 30 Nov. 1965)

**Service history:** acquired in “54/12”, that is in December 65 according to Air Asia’s
Statement of Property of 31 March 66 (in: UTD/CIA/B26F5); promissory note no.14 dated 15 November 65 (UTD/CIA/B9F4) mentions $ 160,000.00 owed by Air America to the Pacific Corp. for this aircraft, so probably it was bought at that time; officially regd. on 12 January 66 (e-mail sent by the Director General, CAA, Republic of China, to Martin Best on 18 October 2012, kindly forwarded to the author by Martin Best); based at Saigon in December 65, but to an unassigned status on 1 January 66 (Planned Aircraft Assignment for January 66, in: UTD/Walker/B7F8); assigned to contract AF49(604)-4379 (Logistical Support Group) for use out of Taipei in April 66 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Kirkpatrick/B1F1) and May 66 (Aircraft status as of 4 May 66, in: UTD/Hickler/B1F2); converted to AAM standard in July 66 (Minutes Ex Com-AACL/AAM of 13 July 66, in: UTD/CIA/B8F1); used as a spare aircraft out of Taipei in May 68 (Aircraft status as of 8 April 66, in: UTD/Herd/B2); leased to China Airlines, Taipei, between 28 April 69 and 28 July 69 (Notification no. YEH-1-58-04869 of 13 May 69, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reel 3); apparently still in August 69 (F.O.C. of 15 August 69, in: UTD/Hickler/BF1); seen in China Airlines colors at Bangkok on 25 March 70 (Aviation Letter 44, July 70, p.2); the lease (contract no.69-18) was extended on 29 April 70 (Letter dated 8 May 70 sent by Air Asia to China Airlines, in: UTD/Bisson/B5 reel 3); current with Air America on 1 July 70 (Leary, The aircraft of Air America, p. 20); a photo taken by Robert Mikesh can be seen in: Love, Wings of Air America, p. 14; put into inactive storage at Tainan on 7 June 71; still there on 1 November 73 (F.O.C.s of 1 July 71, 15 July 71, and 1 November 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B); seen at Tainan minus engines on 13 April 72 (Aviation Letter 67, June 72, p.7).

**Fate:** sold to Air Distribution Inc., Honolulu, HI, on 13 November 73 (Summary of aircraft sales, in: UTD/CIA/B40F6); officially transferred from Air Asia to Air America on 29 November 73; the change of ownership to Air Distribution was noted by the FAA on 30 November 73; the reg. B-1014 was cancelled on 3 December 73; the company went bankrupt in 1975 (many details of the subsequent history of former B-1012 were supplied by John Davis in his e-mail dated 14 November 2004 to Dr. Erik Carlson, who forwarded them to the author); the aircraft was stored at Tainan with Air Asia (Letter by Clyde S. Carter dated 17 December 75, in: UTD/CIA/B17F4); sold to Air Asia on 25 February 76; withdrawn from use and stored September 77.

Douglas C-54G B-1016 36042 Nov. 66 bought from Southern Air Transport; leased from Air Asia CL; previously USAF 45-0589; then N90909, then 45-0589, then CAT B-1016, then leased to China Air B-1016

**Service history:** acquired by CAT in “55/11”, that is in November 66 according to Air Asia’s Statement of Property of 31 March 73 (in: UTD/CIA/B26F5); registered to Air Asia CoLtd as B-1016 on 8 November 66 (Status as of 5 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4); officially regd. on 3 November 66 (e-mail sent by the Director General, CAA, Republic of China, to Martin Best on 18 October 2012, kindly forwarded to the author by Martin Best); used as a cargo aircraft out of Taipei by Civil Air Transport in May 68 (Aircraft status as of 1 May 68, in: UTD/Herd/B2); based at Taipei and used for charters 16-30 June 69 (F.O.C. of 15 June 69, in:
UTD/Hickler/B8F7B) and 16-31 August 69 (F.O.C. of 15 August 69, in: UTD/Hickler/BF1); not listed 1-31 July 71 (F.O.C.s of 1 July 71 and 15 July 71, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7B), but stored, possibly at Tainan (Schedule of aircraft insurances as of 15 July 71, in: UTD/Herb/B2); a fork lift drove into the left wing in South Vietnam on 21 December 71, damaging the left aileron; repaired and returned to service on 23 December 71 (XOXO of 22 Dec. 71 [GMT], in: UTD/Hickler/B25F11; Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 11 January 72, in: UTD/CIA/B9F7); used for cargo trips as required and based at Tainan 16-30 April 73 (F.O.C. of 16 April 73, in: UTD/Kaufman/B1F14); still so 1 November-31 December 73 (F.O.C.s of 1 November 73 and 1 December 73, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); based at Saigon for cargo trips as required 1-28 February 74 (F.O.C. of 1 Feb. 74, in: UTD/CIA/B51F21); not current 1 April-31 May 74 (F.O.C.s of 1 April 74 and 1 May 74, in: UTD/Hickler/B8F7C); to be sold to Plum International Travel Ltd, Jakarta, according to an Agreement of Sale of 7 March 74, but the deal fell thru, as Plum was unable to pay the final payment (Status as of 5 April 74, in: UTD/CIA/B56F4); owned by CATCL as of 31 March 75 (Property Statement as of 31 March 75, in: UTD/CIA/B27F6); was sold by Air Asia to Air America by the mortgage agreement dated 1 October 74, and was immediately sold to Civil Air Transport CL in order to retain Chinese registry (in: UTD/CIA/B9F4; Minutes ExCom-AACL/AAM of 10 September 74, in: UTD/CIA/B10F1); used to send boxes of administrative records from Saigon to Hong Kong and engines from Saigon to Tainan in April 75 (undated report by Boyd D. Mesecher, in: UTD/CIA/B17F4); based at Tainan in March 75 (Telex dated 20 March 75, in: UTD/CIA/B18F2).

Fate: departure from Tainan to the Continental US was scheduled for 8 May 75 (Telex dated 20 March 75, in: UTD/CIA/B18F2); sold by CATCL to Air America on 25 June 75 (Bill of Sale, in: UTD/CIA/B27F16); reg. B-1016 cancelled on 2 July 75 (document in FAA file, kindly sent to the author by Martin Best on 3 October 2013); reportedly regd. to Bo-S-Aire Airlines, Anderson, SC, as N65132 on 2 July 75; apparently not taken up; was to be sold to Bird & Sons / Bird Air, Oakland, CA, on 10 July 75 at $60,000 (Summary of aircraft sales, in: UTD/CIA/B40F6), but apparently this deal did not materialize, as the aircraft remained at Tainan between 15 June 75 and 25 July 75; sold to Bird & Sons on 25 July 75 at $60,000 (Air America, owned aircraft as of 30 September 75, in: UTD/CIA/B56F1; document in FAA file, kindly sent to the author by Martin Best on 3 October 2013), but not listed as sold in the Summary of aircraft sales dated 17 November 1975 (in: UTD/CIA/B56F1); Bird Air sent an application for registration to the FAA on 28 August 75, when it became N65132, and on 10 October 75, reg. N74BA was reserved to the aircraft (documents in FAA file, kindly sent to the author by Martin Best on 3 October 2013); at that time, the aircraft was still at Tainan, being refurbished by Air Asia; after several invoices of October 75, February 76, and July 76 had not been paid by Bird & Sons, Air Asia, following Taiwanese legislation, put the aircraft for sale in an auction on 24 August 76 and again on 31 August 76; as no bidder showed up on both dates, Air Asia legally became the owner of this C-54 on 31 August 76 (documents in FAA file, kindly sent to the author by Martin Best on 3 October 2013); on 7 January 77, Air Asia asked the FAA to deregister C-54 N74BA so that they could sell it, and after receiving the legal documents from Taiwan, the FAA officially deregistered C-54 N74BA on 22 March 77, followed by protests from Bird Air (documents in FAA file, kindly sent to the author by Martin Best on 3 October 2013); sold by Air Asia to the Republic of China Air Force as “S407” in April 1978 (e-mail dated 17 May 2011, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu).
Air America’s contribution to the Bay of Pigs operation against Cuba in 1960/1: C-54s

It is known that most of the pilots who flew in the Bay of Pigs operation against Cuba in April 1961 were Cuban exiles who had been engaged by the Double-Check Corporation. A list of all Cuban pilots involved in that operation can be found in document no. 141164 published on the CIA’s website. Since late September 1960, a fleet of C-54s and C-46s mostly piloted by Cuban exiles flew airdrops to anti-communist rebels operating in three areas of Cuba. Those transport pilots were trained at Retalhuleu, Guatemala (code-named “JMAADD” by the CIA and called “Rayo Base” by the Cubans) by Air America pilots Connie Seigrist and William Beale who had ferried a Air America C-46 B-864 from Taipei to San Jose, Guatemala, between 3 and 9 September 60 and then on to Retalhuleu, Guatemala. Retalhuleu air base was also used to supply the Cuban exile force that was training in the mountains on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala.

The C-54s themselves did not come from Air America but from other sources, and the first two of them arrived from Florida in September 60, probably from Eglin AFB. As to their number, Connie Seigrist recalls: “During the Bay of Pigs […], I can remember at least 5 or 6 different DC-4s just for the Invasion. But for training and base supplying there would only be one or two on base”. In his letter dated 4 January 61 sent to the Chief of the CIA’s WH/4 of the Directorate of Plans, the Chief of the CIA’s WH/4/PM, USMC Col. J. Hawkins, states that 7 C-54s were to be used for the strike and that the Florida base would be Opa Locka, open to CIA operations by that time. Indeed, Opa Locka airport, located in the north of the Miami area, was the airport from where those C-54 took off at night to haul supplies to Retalhuleu in Guatemala. There was also a large Miami-based contractor called AACMF (believed to stand for “American Airmotive Corp., Miami, Florida”) that, according to the microfilms preserved at the USAF’s Historical Research Agency, did a lot of maintenance and other contract work on USAF C-54s in the late fifties and early sixties. So people living in the Miami area may have believed that the C-54s they heard at night taking off from Opa Locka were the same they could see at Miami during daytime. But those nightly visitors did not come from Miami airport, they came from Eglin Air Force Base. And the C-54 pilots of those supply flights to Retalhuleu did not belong to the Miami contractor, but were non-American contract pilots from South East Asia, some of whom were Polish; they also transported the Cuban recruits to Retalhuleu.

In the early sixties, Eglin was the home of two USAF C-54 operators: According to microfilms nos. ACA-2, ACA-3, ACA-4, ACA-6, ACA-11, and AVH-1 preserved at the AFHSA, Maxwell AFB, the USAF Air Proving Ground Center, which had been formed on 1 December 57, had C-54s 42-72740, 42-72528, 45-477, 45-495, and 45-629 in the 1960/1 period, while the 48th Air Rescue Squadron (formed in 1952), operated C-54s between 1956 and 1965 and had C-54s 42-72440, 42-72555, 42-72609, 42-72747, 44-9073, and 45-632 in

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2 Hagedorn / Hellström, Foreign Invaders, p. 126.
4 Leary / LeSchack, Project Coldfeet, pp.113/4.
5 Persons, Bay of Pigs, p.17.
6 E-mail dated 8 December 2004, sent to the author by Douglas Price.
7 E-mail dated 28 January 2005, kindly sent to the author by Connie Seigrist.
9 Prados, President’s secret wars, p.184.
10 Persons, Bay of Pigs, p.21.
11 Persons, Bay of Pigs, p.40.
the 1960/1 period. The permanent presence of those 2 units at Eglin AFB probably served as a good cover for the secret presence of a third unit that was temporarily based at Eglin from late 1960 to June/July 61: the 1045\textsuperscript{th} Operational Evaluation & Training Group, Headquarters Command, Eglin, that is the very same unit whose Detachment 2 was responsible for the secret flights to Tibet.\textsuperscript{14} So there is no doubt that the C-54s assigned to that unit in the 1960/1 period were the aircraft that were used against Cuba. Those C-54s came from a variety of units, all of them non-combat units like Air Base Wings or Training Centers. Eight C-54s have been identified so far, but there must have been at least 2 more of them, as the first 2 C-54s arrived at Retalhuleu in September 60, while the first C-54s were assigned to the 1045\textsuperscript{th} Operational Evaluation & Training Group only in November 60. Four C-54Gs were assigned between 7 and 10 November 1960:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C-54</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-565</td>
<td>OKLAR (Oklahoma City Air Material Area), Tinker AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 7 November 60 (60312), back to OKLAR, Tinker AFB, on 1 June 61 (61152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-520</td>
<td>SHTCE (Sheppard Technical Training Center), Sheppard AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 9 November 60 (60314); back to SHTCE, Sheppard AFB, on 28 June 61 (61179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-631</td>
<td>AOT (Air Observers Training Center), Amarillo AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 10 November 60 (60315), back to AOT, Amarillo AFB, on 13 July 61 (61194)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-636</td>
<td>AOT (Air Observers Training Center), Amarillo AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 10 November 60 (60315), back to AOT, Amarillo AFB, on 13 June 61 (61164)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four more C-54Gs were assigned to the 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 20 and 22 February 1961:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C-54</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-550</td>
<td>2848\textsuperscript{th} Air Base Wing, Norton AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 20 February 61 (61051), back to 2848\textsuperscript{th} Air Base Wing, Norton AFB, on 25 May 61 (61145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-561</td>
<td>1376\textsuperscript{th} CLM Squadron (Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron), Turner AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 20 February 61 (61051), back to 1376\textsuperscript{th} CLM Squadron, Turner AFB, on 29 May 61 (61149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-579</td>
<td>2855\textsuperscript{th} Air Base Wing, Olmsted AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 22 February 61 (61054), back to 2855\textsuperscript{th} Air Base Wing, Olmsted AFB, on 29 May 61 (61149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-611</td>
<td>OKLAR (Oklahoma City Air Material Area), Tinker AFB, to 1045\textsuperscript{th} OETGP, Eglin, on 22 February 61 (61054), back to OKLAR (Oklahoma City Air Material Area), Tinker AFB, on 29 June 61 (61180)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As to the first 2 C-54s that arrived at Retalhuleu in September 1960, they had another origin: they were black mission aircraft belonging to the CIA’s Air Branch. As the USAF’s Assignment Records only list “regular” USAF aircraft, it is not possible to identify these two C-54s from those records. However, the Assignment Records also note when an aircraft leaves regular USAF service, and indeed, some C-54s left the regular USAF in order to go to “top secret”: C-54G 45-558 had left the regular USAF at Clark AFB in the Philippines on 8 February 1957 and had gone to “top secret”.\textsuperscript{15} It had been one of 4 C-54Gs that had been based at Wiesbaden, Germany with 7499 CMP and were transferred to “Top Secret” already in 1952, apparently for service along the Iron Curtain or the Berlin corridor: 45-558, 45-567

\textsuperscript{14} Trest, \textit{Air Commando One}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{15} Microfilm reel no. ACA-11, preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB.
and 45-589 on 3 December and 45-591 on 6 October 52. 16 While 3 of them – 45-558, 45-589, and 45-591 – were transferred to other tasks later, 17 C-54G 45-567 seems to have remained at Wiesbaden all the time.

As to the first 2 C-54s that arrived at Retalhuleu in September 1960, both aircraft were immediately lost: On the very first flight on 28 September 60 – the mission was to drop weapons and ammunition to the guerrillas operating in the Escambray Mountains 18 –, one of those C-54s suffered from engine trouble, after it had been hit by antiaircraft fire, tried to return to Retalhuleu, but made a forced landing somewhere in southern Mexico, where it was seized by the authorities. 19 According to Leroy Fletcher Prouty, 20 this particular C-54 “was ‘clean’, a non-attributable air plane. […] This plane had been on many flights along the Iron Curtain borders, on leaflet drops and on electronic intelligence missions. […] It had been to Clark Field near Manila, flying Tibetans to and from operational training sites. It had often been to the old World War II B-29 Superfortress bomber bases in Saipan where Southeast Asians were being trained in sabotage tactics and paramilitary civic action programs.” All this seems to fit to C-54G 45-558. A little bit later, that is in October 60, the second C-54 was lost, when it crash-landed on a beach close to Retalhuleu, where it was still visible ten years later 21 – this was C-54G 45-592. 22 A single replacement C-54 arrived at Retalhuleu in October 60, 23 and as this aircraft was registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez as HP-321P, it can be easily identified from a letter dated 24 October 1961, by which the Director General de Aeronáutica Civil of Panama confirms to Los Hermanos that upon their request, the provisional registrations for three of Los Hermanos’ aircraft had been cancelled, including C-54 HP-321P, ex 42-72523. Although this letter gives it as a C-54G, it really was a C-54D: In the USAF’s Assignment Records preserved at Maxwell AFB, C-54D 42-72523 is last mentioned when it left regular air force service at Kadena, Okinawa on 1 April 1956 and was transferred to an outfit coded “S ATEDEPTDAF” (Microfilm no. ACA-2). The meaning of that code is unknown, but it probably stands for: “terminated” as to regular USAF service and transferred to a “special” unit reporting directly to the “Department of Defense / Air Force.” Since that time, C-54D 42-72523 does no longer appear in the USAF Assignment Records, but before 1956, it had belonged to the 581st Air Resupply and Communications Wing at Kadena, Okinawa, whose 2 special mission C-54s had passed to the 332nd Troop Carrier Squadron, Medium (Special), Kadena in 1956, 24 and then to Detachment 2, 1045th

16 E-mail dated 21 January 2011, kindly sent to the author by John M. Davis.
17 C-54G 45-558 returned to USAF service and was again transferred to “Top Secret” at Clark AFB in the Philippines on 8 February 1957; C-54G 45-589 ended up as B-1016 with Air America; and C-54G 45-591 returned to USAF service and was again transferred to “Top Secret” at Tinker AFB on 30 April 1955 (Microfilm reel no. ACA-11, preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB).
18 Ferrer, Operation Puma, p.65.
21 Ferrer, Operation Puma, p.66 plus note 2.
22 Vol. I, part II, of Dr. Jack Pleiffer’s Official History of the Bay of Pigs Operation, Vol. I: Air Operations, March 1960-April 1961, (at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/4186/bop-vol1-part2.pdf) lists the references to the entire volume from p. 455 onwards. Under reference no. 67c, at p.460, a “Memo of Directorate of Plans; Deputy Directorate of War Plans, Hq. USAF from Stanley W. Beerli, 2 Nov 60, sub: Loss of C-54G S.N. 45-592 (DPD-8042-60)” is mentioned. As the previous history of this aircraft – it was with the 6605th Air Base Wing in 1956, with the 1742nd TSM Sq in 1957, and with AMCSB / SCAO, Ontario in 1958, from where it went to MAP on 3 March 59 (microfilm no. ACA-11) – does not fit to what Prouty says about the C-54 seized in Mexico, this must have been the one that crashed at Retalhuleu – evidently after it had returned from MAP and gone to “Top secret”. I am very grateful to Clive Turner who brought my attention to this aircraft (e-mail dated 27 July 2012).
23 Ferrer, Operation Puma, p.68.
24 Haas, Apollo’s warriors, pp. 80/1, 92/3.
Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the DGAC Panama to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez (UTD/Bisson/B5, microfilm reel 4)

As to Eglin, it was probably there that all the other C-54s to be used in the operation were “sanitized”, that is USAF markings, other insignia, engine decals, and manufacturer’s labels were taken off to make them non-attributable; and they were given fake serials. Indeed, the serials used by the C-54s of the Fuerza Aérea de Liberación against Cuba were completely arbitrary. What we do know about those serials mostly comes from the log book of one of the Cuban pilots, René García, who once gave it to Leif Hellström. Leif Hellström kindly sent to the author a copy of the pages where García noted his C-54 flights – with the exception of DC-4D “6600”, apparently the alias of C-54D 42-72523, they were all C-54Gs. According to García’s log book, only C-54G “7701” was regularly at “Rayo Base” during the period between February and April 1961, as it was used for all sorts of practices (including emergencies) out of Retalhuleu on 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 February 61, and then for night supply drops to Cuba on 11 February, 1 March, 4 March, 15 March, 20 March, as well as on 9 April and on 20 April 61. Four other C-54s were also used for training at Retalhuleu: C-54G “7003” on 8 February, C-54G “7001” on 9 February, C-54G “6606” on 6 April, and DC-4D “6600” on 7 April 61. Other night drops into Cuba were made by C-54Gs that apparently were used for one mission only during that period: “7702” on 13 February, “6604” on 7 March, and “6705” on 10 March; “6609” was flown back to Miami with passengers on 22 April 61. Other sources state that C-54s “6096” and HP-320 (c/n 36063, registered to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, Panamá around 1960) did also belong to the fleet.

25 Trest, *Air Commando One*, p.85; Conboy / Morrison, *The CIA’s secret war in Tibet*, pp. 44/5.
27 E-mail dated 24 June 2005, kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström.
28 Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean Air Forces*, p.148; Burnett / Slack / Davis / Hagedorn / Kuhn, *Central America and the Caribbean civil aircraft registers*, p.29.
Apart from training at Retalhuleu and supply drops to Cuba, C-54Gs were also used to fly supply missions between Retalhuleu (“JMADD”) and Puerto Cabezas (“JMTIDE”), but these missions were flown by North American pilots like, for example, Albert C. Persons, author of the book *Bay of Pigs*. Training for those US pilots was arranged at Fort Lauderdale where they practiced emergency procedures, blacked-out approaches and landings, and low-level night flights. When the day of the invasion approached, those C-54s also airlifted equipment, supplies, and personnel from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabezas; these flights stepped up considerably during the first week of April 61. On 8 and 9 April, C-54s flown by contract crews arrived at Retalhuleu, and by mid-afternoon of 9 April 61, no less than 6 C-54s and 3 C-46s were lined up at Retalhuleu air base, ready to fly the Cuban troops to Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua on 10 and 11 April 61. On 12 April 61, there were 3 C-54s at Puerto Cabezas.

During the *Bay of Pigs* operation itself, airdrops are known to have been made by the following C-54s:

17 April 61:
- C-54 “7711”, piloted by Captain Ceregeda, to Drop Zone 3

18 April 61:
- C-54 “7711”, piloted by Captain Valdes, to “Blue Beach”
- C-54 “7710”, piloted by Captain Ceregeda, to “Red Beach”
- C-54 “7107”, piloted by Captain Menendes, to “Blue Beach”
- C-54 “7711”, piloted by Captain Tellechea, to “Blue Beach”

19 April 61:
- C-54 “7711”, piloted by Captain ?, to “Blue Beach”

According to the Memorandum “JMGLOW Bonuses” of 7 September 61, that is document no. 141130 published on the CIA’s website, no Air America pilots flew the C-54s during the operation.

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31 Persons, *Bay of Pigs*, p.75.
Air America and VIAT’s C-54s:

VIAT or Vietnamese Air Transport,34 that is Bureau 45B – Northern Service (Biet Kich So Bac)35 was a front used by the CIA and the South Vietnamese Government for commando raids into North Vietnam between 1961 and 1964. Air America had a contract with VIAT (no. 61-119) which covered call-type personnel services in South East Asia including Air America’s flight, ground, supply and maintenance personnel, as may be called by VIAT.36 The activities of VIAT’s C-54s are well described in the excellent book by Conboy / Andradé: With the help of Lieutenant Colonel Aderholt and his 1045th Operational Evaluation & Training Group, VIAT received their first C-54 in August 61 – that is former CAT B-1002 –, and Captain Edward Smith and Lieutenant David Clarke of the 1045th assisted the operations at Saigon. The South Vietnamese pilots were commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Cao Ky, and all of them were trained by Air America pilot Al Judkins and Air America navigator Jim Keck. As Jim Keck recalls,37 this time, training included the use of radar, and of course low-level flying and navigation: “Many times we would go out to sea about thirty miles, stay low, say about 100 feet and make ‘coast ins’ (crossing the coast of South Vietnam) at a precise point. They became fairly good at this”.38 This first VIAT C-54 was XV-NUB: A photo taken in the early sixties of VIAT’s mission board shows that their C-54 was XV-NUB with msn 3078.39 Flight training on the new C-54 ended in early 1962, and at that time, two South Vietnamese crews were ready. On 20 January 62, VIAT’s C-54 departed Saigon’s Tan Son Nhat airport and dropped a team of five agents, code-named “Europa” into Hoa Binh Province in central North Vietnam. But a couple of weeks later, misfortune struck, when on a resupply flight to team “Castor”, VIAT’s C-54 crashed into a mountain during bad weather.40 Jim Keck recalls: “The English newspaper in Hong Kong later had a story about it. Part of the crew were still alive and reported that, ‘Oh, yes, we were trained by two Americans, Mr. Jim and Mr. Al’. That was the names we had told them”.41

With the help of Lieutenant Colonel Aderholt’s 1045th OETG, VIAT received another C-54 in March 62 – this time probably one of the aircraft operated by the 1045th OETG42 – and

34 See: Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp. 33-44.
35 See: http://ngothelinh.tripod.com/Tribute.htm
37 Manuscript of the memoirs of Jim Keck, pp.22-24, kindly supplied to the author by Jim Keck himself.
38 E-mail dated 2 February 2002, sent by Jim Keck to the author.
40 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and commandos, pp.44/5.
41 E-mail dated 2 February 2002, sent to the author by Jim Keck.
42 According to Haas, Apollo’s warriors, in 1952, the 581st ARCW (Air Resupply and Communications Wing), Clark, among others, had 2 C-118s and 2 C-54s, which were reserved for special missions, some for the CIA (pp.80/1). When on 8 Sept. 53, USAF reduced the 581st ARCW to group size, they still had those 4 special mission aircraft (2 C-118s and 2 C-54s). In October 54, the group moved from Clark to Okinawa, and in September 56, the 581st was officially deactivated, and the remaining aircraft transferred to the 322nd Troop Carrier Squadron (Medium) (Special) (pp.92/3). When the 322nd TCS itself ceased to exist in November 57, only that Kadena-based special cell (Detachment 1) of the 322nd TCS survived (Conboy / Morrison, The CIA’s secret war in Tibet, p.271, note 17). This became Detachment 2, 313th Air Division, and then Detachment 2, 1045th Operational Evaluation & Training Group (OETG), reporting directly to the CIA (Trest, Air Commando One, p.83). One of those special mission C-54s was C-54D 42-72523, which left the 581st ASL Group (= 581st ARCW), Kadena in 1965 to an unknown unit, but reappeared in 1961 as a participant in the Bay of Pigs operation, when Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gomez asked the Panama DGA to cancel its registration HP-321-P in October 61 (Letter dated 24 October 61, sent by the DGAC Panama to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gomez, in: UTD/Bisson/B microfilm reel 4). The identity of the second original special mission C-54 is unknown, but it may have been C-54G 45-558, which left the USAF at Clark in February 57 and went to “Top Secret” (Microfilm reel no. ACA-11, preserved at the AFHRA, Maxwell AFB). According to Trest (Air Commando One, p.85), there were even 3 C-54s at Kadena in January 60 – possibly including the aircraft normally assigned to the 6313th Air Base Wing at Kadena (in mid-1960, this was C-54D 42-72694, a former 581st ARCW aircraft;
this time, the pilots were to be volunteers from China Airlines who had previously served with the Republic of China Air Force. Once again, two Air America navigators – including Ken Rockwell – trained the crews, this time on Taiwan. The cover story was that they were South Vietnamese commercial pilots, so the registration was probably a civilian one – maybe XV-NUE. Between February and May 62, the Chinese crews were trained on Taiwan, apparently in their new C-54. In May 62, the Chinese crews and their new C-54 were ready, and in May 62, VIAT’s C-54 flew from Taiwan to South Vietnam. So Captain Su-Chin Tai and other China Airlines crew members flew the VIAT C-54 in civilian clothes, and they were given Vietnamese names to cover their real identities. Known drops in North Vietnam included teams “Tourbillon” (May 62), “Eros” (May 62), “Tarzan” (6 January 63), “Pegasus” (12 April 63), and other teams in May 63 and on 8 June 63. After the C-123Bs had arrived in June 63, the C-54 was to be phased out, but on its last mission, after dropping team “Packer” on 4 July 63, the aircraft disappeared: Probably it had hit a mountain; Clarence P. Fu confirms that crash date from Chinese sources. But in June 63, there was so much need for transportation that during that month Republic of China Air Force crews flew a RoCAF C-54 on loan to VIAT on missions into North Vietnam. Probably, the RoCAF C-54 that flew for VIAT in June 63 used the registration XV-NUF during its flights into North Vietnam.

It is difficult to identify VIAT’s second C-54. The Republic of China Air Force had had a C-54 since the forties – Chiang Kai-shek’s personal C-54B “001” since 1946. On 16 May 58, a former Foshing Airlines C-54B that had been acquired in the US in April 58 for service with the Indonesian rebel group called “Permesta” and flown to Mapanget in Indonesia on 15 May 58, was confiscated by Republic of China Air Force personnel at Sanga Sanga the following day. Taking charge of the entire RoCAF contingent at Sanga Sanga was General I Fu-en, chief of the RoCAF intelligence. The aircraft is said to have been C-54B msn 10472 ex USAF 42-72367 and possibly registered B-1406 at that time. As to its fate, Clarence Fu notes: “I remember Moon Chin told me Gen. I sent the aircraft to Okinawa to change the number”. As a C-54 destined for the RoCAF would have gone to Taiwan and not to Okinawa and as this aircraft was never seen again on Taiwan after that date, it is believed to have become another C-54 of the CIA’s Kadena, Okinawa based Detachment 2, 1045th

see Microfilm reels nos. ACA-2 and 3) or the former Foshing C-54 confiscated in 1958 (see below). And in an interview conducted by Prof. William Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL 28-30 August 1990 (in: UTD/Leary/ B68F9), General Aderholt said that Detachment 2 had even 5 C-54s in the early sixties. In 1966, Detachment 2, 1045th OETG still had one C-54 (e-mail dated 26 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by General Aderholt). All this could mean that the VIAT C-54 that crashed on 4 July 63 was one of the C-54s that had belonged to Det 2, 1045th OETG.

43 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, p.49.
44 "The VIAT pilot Mr. Tai told me that the VIAT C-54 was flown from Taipei to Vietnam for the first time. He was on that plane and there was another passenger, Nguyen Cao Ky" (e-mail dated 25 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu).
45 E-mail dated 6 May 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
47 E-mail dated 17 March 2005, kindly sent to the author.
48 Conboy / Andradé, Spies and Commandos, p.59.
49 In his e-mail dated 14 February 2009 kindly sent to the author, Martin Best notes: “The first RoCAF C-54 was XT-T01, a C-54B pinched from the CNAC order for six in 1946, and exchanged for the C-54D ordered for Chiang Kai-shek but delivered to CNAC as XT-T07. This may have become C-54001, as CKS used to use ‘001’, but there is no proof of the link that I have seen.” This aircraft would be msn 10529 ex USAF 42-72424, which was always reported to have become B-1801 with China Airlines later.
50 See Conboy / Morrison, Feet to the fire, pp. 129-31.
51 E-mail dated 19 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by Martin Best.
52 The Foshing pilot who had flown the aircraft in Indonesia (Conboy / Morrison, Feet to the fire, pp. 129-31).
53 E-mail dated 22 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
54 E-mail dated 22 February 2009, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.
Operational Evaluation & Training Group, using whatever identity. If VIAT’s second C-54 came from the CIA’s Det. 2, 1045th OETG, on Okinawa, it could have been one of 5 aircraft,\(^\text{55}\) which do not appear in the USAF Aircraft Assignment Records and whose identities can only be guessed\(^\text{56}\) – at least as to 3 of these aircraft.\(^\text{57}\) VIAT’s second C-54, the one that crashed on 4 July 63, seems to have been delivered to Taiwan in February 62 for training, probably not displaying RoCAF colors, and as all other known Republic of China Air Force C-54s were acquired only in the early seventies,\(^\text{58}\) this C-54 probably also came from CIA sources. If VIAT’s second C-54 came from the CIA’s Det. 2, 1045th OETG, on Okinawa, it must have been one of those aircraft that were never seen again after 4 July 63 – most probably 45-558.

In August 1961, the RoCAF’s 34th Squadron received a C-54G from the CIA that was still painted in basic USAF colors, but without any markings or flag on it. It had just “54002” painted on the fin.\(^\text{59}\) CIA document no. DPD-3361-61, released on 14 August 2002, mentioned C-54G 45-577 as being an “Agency-owned C-54G” transferred from the US to South East Asia in August 1961.\(^\text{60}\) So apparently, this aircraft was RoCAF C-54G “54002”.

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\(^\text{55}\) According to an interview with General Aderholt conducted by Prof. William Leary at Fort Walton Beach, FL 28-30 August 1990 (in: UTD/Leary/B68F9), Detachment 2 had 5 C-54s in the early sixties.

\(^\text{56}\) The only moment when aircraft of the CIA’s Air Branch can be identified from the USAF’s Aircraft Assignment Records is when they left regular USAF service: In the fifties this was often indicated by an entry saying that an aircraft went to “Top Secret”, since 1959/60, the unit that stands for the CIA’s Air Branch was the 1045th Operational Evaluation & Training Group or OETG with Headquarters Command at Eglin AFB, Field 3 (“Duke Field”) in Florida and Detachment 2 at Kadena, Okinawa. While some aircraft were transferred to the 1045th OETG only for a couple of months, evidently for use in a certain project only, other former Air Branch aircraft reappear in the USAF’s Aircraft Assignment Records only after many years of absence, and then often as “GI”, that is as “gained from outside USAF” by the 1045th OETG, Eglin.

\(^\text{57}\) One was probably former Bay of Pigs C-54D 42-72523. This aircraft seems to have been converted to C-54G, as in his letter dated 24 October 61 to Los Hermanos Sebastian y Gómez, the Director General de Aeronáutica Civil of Panama (in: UTD/Bisson/B microfilm reel 4; see the photo above) lists 42-72523 as a C-54G. The second one was probably former Foshing Airlines B-1406, that is C-54E 42-72367 – using whatever identity (see above). A third CIA C-54 based at Okinawa at that time was probably the former Bay of Pigs aircraft that had been impounded in Mexico on 28 September 60 and was later returned to the United States (see Prouty, The secret team, chapter 2, at http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/ST/STchp2.html, pp.1-3) – believed to have been C-54G 45-558, but this one was still impounded in October 61 (“Inspector General’s Survey of the Cuban Operation”, dated October 1961, document no. 129914 published by the CIA at http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000129914.pdf, no.1, p.98, that is p.106 on the website); a photo of 45-558 taken at Taipei or Tainan probably in 1962 and showing the aircraft being repainted in an unusual color scheme (photo kindly sent to the author by Leif Hellström on 20 July 2011) makes believe that this was the CIA C-54 destined to become VIAT’s second C-54.\(^\text{61}\)

\(^\text{58}\) C-54G 45-0624 on 12 December 71 (71346; see AVH-17; to the RoCAF as “50624”, seen at Taipei on 28 March 73), C-54G 45-0520 on 15 May 72 (72136; see AVH-17; it was reported to have become RoCAF “45520”), C-54D 42-72545 on 15 August 72 (72228; see AVH-17; to the RoCAF as “72545”; seen at Taipei on 28 March 73 and 8 October 77), MC-54M 44-9106 on 13 January 73 (73013; see AVH-19; it was reported to have become RoCAF “49106”), and C-54D 42-72747 was still with the USAF at Taipei in 1973 (AVH-19; it was reported to have become RoCAF “72747”).

\(^\text{59}\) E-mail dated 5 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.

\(^\text{60}\) Document sent by Leif Hellström to Clarence Fu, who kindly forwarded it to the author on 16 February 2011. For the whole period from 1955 to 1973, there is no trace of 45-577 in the USAF Aircraft Assignment Records (Microfilm reel nos. ACA-11 and AVH-1 to AVH-19). This aircraft became “C-54002” (no.2) or “S4002” with the RoCAF in August 1961 and then B-1803 with China Airlines in July 64 (e-mail dated 17 February 2011, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu).
The CIA C-54G “54002” in basic USAF colors: at the handover ceremony in August 1961 (photo by Lu Te-Chi via Clarence Fu and drawing by Gary K. Lai, both reproduced here with kind permission from Clarence Fu and Gary K. Lai)

Around 1963, this aircraft was photographed again in South Vietnam in RoCAF colors

C-54 “C-54002”, taken by Jack Friell in South Vietnam around 1963 and published by Clarence Fu in 2006, reproduced here with kind permission from Clarence Fu
similar to those of the VIP Squadron markings,\textsuperscript{61} this time displaying the RoCAF roundel and the flag of Taiwan and bearing serial “C-54002”. This is believed to have been the RoCAF aircraft that flew supplemental missions into North Vietnam in June 63.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{61} E-mail dated 18 February 2009 kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu.

\textsuperscript{62} E-mail dated 5 April 2004, kindly sent to the author by Clarence Fu: “By the way, there was another mysterious C-54G. Its code is C-54002 painted on the fin. The CIA had provided it to the 34 the Sqn. in Aug 1961.” This aircraft was also “asked by the Americans to fly missions in Vietnam in June 1963.”